

Frequently Asked Questions **Mentoring**

What is mentoring?

A mentor is defined as a “wise and trusted advisor,” someone who nurtures and guides a younger protégée, or “mentee,” in the pursuit of their goals. All of us have had mentors—an aunt, a teacher, a coach, a pastor—who inspired us to achieve great things while helping us avoid negative influences and potential barriers. Behind every successful adult is at least one mentor who showed the way. But not all youth in Cook County are so lucky. Many lack positive role models and struggle to find voices of wisdom and compassion in their community.

Does mentoring work?

The mentors provided by formal programs such as Stepping Stones are able to achieve powerful results for the youth they work with. Prominent studies of mentoring programs found that mentored youth:

- were 46% less likely than their peers to start using illegal drugs
- were 27% less likely to initiate alcohol use
- were 38% less likely to engage in violence
- skipped school 52% less
- decreased lying to their parents by 37%

Locally, the Stepping Stones Mentoring Program has also shown tremendous results:

- 75% of mentees improved their grades in key subjects
- Unexcused absences from school declined by 40% for mentored youth
- 85% of mentees reported feeling more confident about school
- 65% of mentees reported improved relations with their family, 55% said they had improved peer relationships
- 83% of the parents of participating youth felt that the program had improved their child’s self-esteem, attitudes, and relationships.
- Alcohol and substance use decreased by 30% in mentored youth.

How does Stepping Stones provide mentoring?

Stepping Stones recruits adult volunteers from the community to serve as one-to-one mentors with youth from two local middle schools, Jefferson and Russell. Matches meet weekly for a minimum of one year. The matches meet alternately between the school sites, where mentors assist with academic and educational activities, and trips into the community, where they can explore additional recreational and youth developmental activities. All Stepping Stone matches go on additional group outings once a quarter.

Stepping Stones takes a broad developmental approach to mentoring that focuses on helping youth build their own capacity to succeed in education and in life. By empowering youth to make good decisions and set positive goals, Stepping Stone strives to impact:

- Academic achievement and attitudes towards school and education
- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Gang involvement and delinquency
- Family and peer relations
- Youth self-esteem and confidence

Who can serve as a Stepping Stone mentor?

Our mentors must be at least 21 years of age and able to pass our screening process, which includes a criminal background records check, a personal interview, reference checks, and pre-match orientation. Mentors must agree to the time requirements of the program (one hour a week for a minimum of one year) and have access to transportation to mentoring activities. Beyond that, any caring adult from our community can serve as a mentor provided he or she has an open mind, a compassionate heart, and the desire to give back to the community.

Who are the youth in the program?

Because we believe that *every* child can benefit from the gifts of a mentor, the Stepping Stones program is open to *all* students at the two school sites. Most youth are referred to the program by teachers, counselors, parents, and other youth development staff from Cook County Youth Services. Our mentees come from diverse backgrounds and have diverse needs. But more than anything, they simply need someone to help show them the way, regardless of their specific goals and dreams.

How do I know that Stepping Stones is a safe, quality program?

Stepping Stones follows the established program guidelines found in the National Mentoring Partnership’s *Elements of Effective Practice*. These guidelines ensure that:

- All volunteers are properly screened and trained prior to working with their mentee.
- Youth are matched with an appropriate mentor that can help them achieve their goals.
- Meaningful youth development activities form the core of the mentoring relationships.
- The program rigorously supervises the mentor-mentee relationships.
- Appropriate policies and procedures are in place to govern the mentoring relationships and program operations.
- Ongoing training and support is offered to all participants.
- The program is rigorously evaluated for continuous improvement.

In addition to these guidelines, Stepping Stones is governed by an Advisory Council comprising educators, youth development specialists, parents, and community leaders who review and monitor the program.

How can I learn more?

Learn more about Stepping Stones by visiting us on the Web at www.stepsingstonementors.com, or by calling us at (123) 456-7890. You can also drop by our main office at 123 Somewhere Street, Suite 4. We’d be happy to answer your questions and explain more about how we bring the magic of mentoring to the youth of Cook County.